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LETTERS

MORE ON LAMPHERE'S NEWS

New York City

In her letter to *The Nation* [July 10-17], ABC News investigative reporter Patricia Lynch maintains that ABC's story about former F.B.I. agent Robert Lamphere and the breaking of K.G.B. codes is not "old news"; that Lamphere says he never spoke "on or off the record about the broken K.G.B. code in relation to the Rosenberg case" until he spoke to ABC News"; that Lamphere has never been referred to as a public source about the codes in relation to the Rosenberg case; and that the existence of the codes proves Lamphere's contention that the F.B.I. knew "of the Rosenbergs' involvement with the Soviets through K.G.B. messages. . . ." In ABC's press release about the documentary, the network claimed that these codes gave the government "convincing evidence of the guilt of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg" and that they "confirmed to the U.S. government that the Rosenbergs were guilty of leaking U.S. atomic secrets to the Soviet Union."

ABC's story is framed in such a manner as to suggest that the K.G.B. codes named the Rosenbergs. Lynch evidently told Peter Kihss (*The New York Times*, May 27) that "sources maintained that the result was the arrest of the Rosenbergs." The codes, in other words, apparently named Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

The treatment of these codes by Lynch and ABC News indicates very sloppy journalism. As co-authors of a forthcoming book on the Rosenberg case, we were invited by ABC News to an advance screening of the J. Edgar Hoover documentary on May 26. We spoke before and after the showing with executive producer Pamela Hill, producer-director Tom Bywaters, correspondent Marshall Frady and Patricia Lynch. Immediately after the screening, we told them—or tried to tell them—that we found grave fault with their story on two grounds. First, that it was indeed old news. We mentioned David C. Martin's *Newsweek* article (May 19, 1980), and Lynch responded that Martin had violated an understanding with Lamphere that his conversation was to be off the record. We said that even if that was true, *Newsweek* had run a more complete version of the same story two years earlier, and so the ABC program was hardly a scoop.

Second, and more important, we told Lynch that it was misleading to insinuate that the K.G.B. codes named the Rosenbergs in 1948. We pointed out that such a claim made no sense whatsoever. If it was true, why did the F.B.I. do nothing about the couple until 1950? Lynch insisted that this is precisely what the codes indicated and that Lamphere and her other sources had told her so. We responded that Lamphere himself had stressed this was not the case when we spoke with him. She argued that that simply could not be true.

We told Lynch that one of us, Ronald Radosh, had taped an on-the-record conversation with Lamphere on June 23, 1980. Lamphere said that the K.G.B. codes named others in a Soviet spy ring and indicated that an unnamed Soviet agent had tried to recruit Max Elitcher. Lamphere said: "We were trying to find out the identity of who was running the network as far back as 1948. We knew nothing about Rosenberg [being] the person at that time . . . I knew that I was looking for the guy who tries to recruit Elitcher. That's what I want. But I don't have any idea who it is."

But William Reuben ["ABC's Old News," *The Nation*, June 19] is also sloppy when he tries to undermine Lamphere's testimony entirely. . . . Material we have gathered in our research sustains some of Lamphere's claims, and since Lamphere was in charge of the section that worked on Soviet counter-intelligence, his knowledge of the contents of the K.G.B. codes does not depend, as Reuben claims, on whether or not such material had been released to Marshall Perlin. Likewise, Lamphere's role as "supervisor of the code operation," to use Patricia Lynch's description, does not sustain ABC News's grandiose claims as to the import of his testimony.

Ronald Radosh
Joyce Milton

REUBEN REPLIES

New York City

Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton charge me with being sloppy because, they say, I claim that Robert Lamphere's knowledge of the K.G.B. codes depended "on whether or not such material had been released to Marshall Perlin." Since I do not profess to be able to read Lamphere's mind, I have no way of figuring out the perimeters of his knowledge. ABC's documentary, its advance press releases and its spokesperson's statement to *The New York Times* unmistakably implied that documentary evidence had now been released by the government. The reference to Perlin and the Justice Department in my June 19 editorial addressed itself solely to that ABC-created impression.

As for the "testimony" Radosh and Milton refer to, Lamphere claimed, as reported in the 1980 *Newsweek* article, in David C. Martin's 1980 book *Wilderness of Mirrors* and in Peter Kihss's recent story in *The New York Times*, that the Rosenbergs were implicitly "identified" and discovered through the broken K.G.B. codes.

I should also point out that this former F.B.I. agent has never told his story in a courtroom or under oath in any formal proceeding. To refer, therefore, to Lamphere's "testimony," as Radosh and Milton do in their letter, is misleading. It seems to me that to describe what Lamphere is currently offering, a more accurate word than "testimony" might be "scuttlebutt."

William A. Reuben